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Rev Father Michael Joseph Kelleher

BIRTH 25 Jun 1928
Blackpool, County Cork, Ireland

DEATH 20 Aug 2014 (aged 86)
High Point, Guilford County, North Carolina, USA

BURIAL [Belmont Abbey Cemetery](#)
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Fr. Kelleher said frequently that his only big hobby was people and it was the love of people that led him to give up the life of a Trappist monk in New Zealand and become a parish priest in North Carolina. Father Kelleher died at Pennybyrn in Highpoint on August 20, 2014 at the age of 86. He was born June 25, 1928 in Blackpool, a part of Cork City in Ireland. As a young man, he wanted to become an African missionary, but his mother would not give permission, fearing she would never see him again. Instead, he entered Mount Melleray Abbey in County Waterford, a community of Cistercian monks, taking the name Gregory. He was ordained a Trappist priest on December 20, 1953 and one year later, in 1954, sent to New Zealand with five other monks to establish the Southern Star Abbey in Hawkes Bay. While there he would help in a parish where they were short a priest and fell in love with parish ministry. After returning to Ireland in 1961, he asked and received permission to leave the monastery and become a diocesan priest, if he could find a bishop to take him. Bishop Vincent S. Waters of the Diocese of Raleigh welcomed him to North Carolina in 1966. He was assigned to the Missionary Fathers Apostolate as an assistant at St. Gabriel's in Greenville until September, 1966. Between then and April, 1970, he served as an assistant at St. Patrick's in Charlotte, Immaculate Heart of Mary in High Point and Our Lady of Lourdes in Raleigh. Father Kelleher became administrator of Bishop McGuinness High School in Winston-Salem in April, 1970 and served at the school until June, 1971, when he became pastor of St. Joseph's in Asheboro. From August, 1972, until March, 1973, he was pastor of St. John's in Waynesville. He was pastor of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Albemarle from March, 1973, until August, 1977, when he became pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption in Charlotte. In July, 1986, Father Kelleher became pastor of St. Lawrence in Asheville. In October of that year, he moved to Hendersonville as pastor of Immaculate Conception parish. After completing a sabbatical, Father Kelleher became administrator, and later pastor, of Our Lady of the Rosary parish in Lexington in October, 1991. In 1993, he served as chaplain to Bishop McGuinness High School. His last assignment was pastor of St. Dorothy in Lincolnton in 1998. Father Kelleher retired from active duty in 1999. After retirement, he was reassigned as chaplain to Bishop McGuinness High School until 2010. Father Kelleher was the youngest of seven children, he was predeceased by his parents, John Kelleher and Mary Murphy, and all his siblings: John, May, Rita, Hannah, Eilish and Kathleen. He is survived by his nieces and nephews: Joseph Crowley, Brid Doyle, Delores Fitzgerald, Bernard White, Sean and Gerard Murphy, Marian Keating, Jim, Siobhain and Frances O'Mahony, Sean, Robert, Martin and Gregory Healy. A memorial Mass will be celebrated by the Most Reverend Peter J. Jugis at Holy Cross Church in Kernersville, NC on Wednesday, September 3, 2014 at 11 o'clock. Please pray for the happy repose of his soul.